



Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State
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BYSIEWICZ RETURNS TO WEST HAVEN VETERANS' HOSPITAL, REGISTERS PATIENTS TO VOTE FOR NOVEMBER ELECTION

VA NOW PERMITS NON-PARTISAN VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES DUE TO PRESSURE FROM SECRETARY OF THE STATE, CONGRESS, AND ADVOCATES

WEST HAVEN: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz today fulfilled a promise to return to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital in West Haven to register patients to vote in the November 4th General Election. Bysiewicz registered more than 30 V.A. patients to vote and provided absentee ballot applications to at least a dozen of the newly registered voters. So far this year, Secretary Bysiewicz has registered nearly 70 V.A. patients to vote at the West Haven facility which houses approximately 250 inpatients.

Secretary Bysiewicz held a registration and voter education session at the VA Hospital in August prior to the state's primaries, despite a national VA policy at the time banning non-partisan voter registration drives. That ban was lifted due to pressure from Secretary Bysiewicz and a bipartisan coalition of fellow Secretaries of State throughout the U.S., as well as Congress and advocates for veterans and voting rights.

"Our veterans have sacrificed so much to preserve our fundamental right to vote," said Bysiewicz, "The least we can do as election officials is make sure every V.A. patient who wants to can participate in what is certain to be the most important election in a generation. We fought hard and won a great victory to preserve the voting rights of our

wounded warriors. Now it's important we reach out to make sure they are registered to vote before the deadline and understand how to cast a ballot in Connecticut."

Voter Registration cards mailed into local registrars of voters must be postmarked no later than Tuesday October 21st, while individual voters still have until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday October 28th to turn registration cards in person at town offices. Bysiewicz was joined at the West Haven V.A. Hospital today by representatives from the League of Women Voters of Connecticut and the Republican Registrar of Voters in West Haven JoAnn Callegari. In addition to assistance with voter registration, Secretary Bysiewicz provided the VA patients with materials detailing voters' rights, proper forms of identification at the polls and applications for absentee ballots. Bysiewicz also answered questions about the new optical scan and vote-by-phone technology in use for the November general election.

"There is not a lot of time left to register to vote and many of our injured or ill military veterans in VA Hospitals throughout the country need help," added Bysiewicz, "I would strongly urge my colleagues in other states and anyone who cares about our veterans or voting rights to contact the VA hospital in your state and arrange for a non-partisan voter registration drive as soon as you can. The message we have received loud and clear from these veterans is that they desperately want to make their voices heard at the polls. It is our duty and responsibility to help them. I thank the VA in Connecticut for coordinating voter registration activities with our office."

In September, United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake reversed a nationwide directive issued May 5th banning voter registration drives at VA Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and shelters for homeless veterans instituted. This followed months of protest by Secretary Bysiewicz, who led a national coalition of 22 Secretaries of State calling on the ban to be lifted. Bysiewicz initially visited the West Haven V.A. Hospital in June but was turned away when she tried to register patients to vote.

It was in June that Secretary Bysiewicz met 92 year-old Martin O'Neal, a World War II veteran bound to a wheelchair since losing his leg in combat during the winter of 1944. O'Neal told Bysiewicz that he had lived at the West Haven V.A. Hospital for about a year and wanted to register in 2007 but no voting information was available and no V.A. nursing staff could answer his questions about voting. Bysiewicz registered O'Neal and about a dozen of his fellow veterans on the sidewalk outside the V.A. Hospital.

Despite the recent openness by the VA allowing non-partisan registration drives, Bysiewicz still supports federal legislation in Congress to require the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to act as a Federal Voter Registration Agency as prescribed under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This would require the V.A. to provide voter registration information to anyone seeking services from the agency. A bill sponsored by Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) was passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives in September and awaits action in the Senate. The Senate Committee on Rules and Administration held hearings on the "Veterans Voting Support Act" – sponsored by Senators Diane Feinstein(D-CA) and John Kerry(D-MA) – in September. This legislation is also supported nationally by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, Common Cause, Demos, The League of Women Voters, and The American Association of People with Disabilities.